

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

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## AIDS EXPERTS SEE HOPE, CONCERNS IN CONFRONTING VIRUS

More needs to be done to win the fight against HIV/AIDS, they say..... 1

## HIGH STAKES ACCOMPANY GLOBAL CLIMATE CHANGE

Nations meet in Bali, Indonesia, on how to head off global warming..... 3

## NEW APPROACH TO DEVELOPMENT EMBRACES INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Global Development Commons will democratize access to information ..... 4

## MODERN TRANSIT SYSTEM COMES TO CAMEROON, THANKS TO U.S. COMPANY

Bus partnership draws interest from investors, other African countries ..... 5

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## AIDS EXPERTS SEE HOPE, CONCERNS IN CONFRONTING VIRUS

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More needs to be done to win the fight against HIV/AIDS, they say

Washington – On the eve of World AIDS Day, President Bush renewed his pledge to fight the global HIV/AIDS pandemic.

“The pandemic of HIV/AIDS can be defeated,” he said November 30, through international cooperative efforts such as his President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR). “We continue to fund research and develop new methods of treatment and prevention,” he said, referring to PEPFAR’s five-year, \$15 billion commitment to fight the disease.

World AIDS Day also gives health professionals and public health advocates a chance to send a message, and in 2007 the message from AIDS experts was blunt.

“We are losing the fight against AIDS,” Dr. Ward Cates, president of Family Health International and a leading epidemiologist, said at a November 28 briefing at the U.S. Capitol building. He acknowledged significant successes in treatment with anti-retroviral drugs of the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), which causes AIDS. But he cited annual HIV/AIDS infection statistics -- 2.5 million worldwide



A large AIDS ribbon hangs from the North Portico of the White House, November 30, in honor of World AIDS Day, December 1. (© AP Images)

-- saying more must be done to contain the disease.

“We have to reverse this. We need prevention now,” he said.

Cates was one of several experts who spoke at the function sponsored by the Global Health Council (GHC), the African Union Mission to the United States, Family Health International (FHI) and the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO).

There was consensus on the need for better preventive measures. Amalia Del Riego, PAHO project manager, emphasized the importance of hindering mother-to-child transmission. She said there is a huge gap between need and prevention in Latin American and Caribbean countries. Domestic violence and sexual abuse of young people are contributing factors to the spread of AIDS there, as elsewhere, she added.

Africa remains the continent most ravaged by HIV/AIDS. Dr. Robert Einterz of Indiana University described a successful partnership with Moi University in Kenya that tackles the multifaceted problem at all community levels. The Academic Model for Prevention and Treatment of HIV/AIDS (AMPATH), funded by PEPFAR and private philanthropy, centers on a teaching referral hospital. “Kenyans do the work,” Einterz said, who is a consultant there. “We’ve treated over 60,000 individuals now in 26 sites,” rural and urban.

The AMPATH approach has developed over time to include a farm to help patients with nutritional needs, after they found that many people on anti-retroviral drugs failed to thrive because they were on the verge of starvation. He said that after six months or so, “they get healthy enough to go back to do their farming.”

U.S. Assistant Global AIDS Coordinator Michele Moloney-Kitts agreed that “while we have a lot of success to claim around the world,” prevention of mother-to-child transmission must be improved, as must outreach activities. “We are still operating at a hospital level ... reaching out to communities is an ongoing challenge,” she said.

“HIV/AIDS is really a disease of inequality, it is not necessarily a disease of poverty, although it does make poor people poorer,” Moloney-Kitts said. “[A]ddressing gender issues and the inequality of women throughout all our interventions is hugely important.”

Numerous U.S. government agencies participate in international partnership programs with governments and the private sector, but the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the National Institutes of Health take the lead in strategies against AIDS.

Dr. S. Ken Yamashita, USAID’s director of the Office of HIV/AIDS in the Bureau for Global Health, told USINFO, “We want to make sure that the technical content of these programs has the highest level of expertise and best possible impact.”

He said that the infection rate is grim -- “for every one person that goes on treatment, six become infected.” He added, “It’s not so much that we are losing the war on prevention. It’s unless we deal with prevention, we will eventually lose the war on AIDS.”

That said, research on new prevention technologies goes on apace and the landscape changes quickly. Changing risky sexual behavior is still the key to prevention, the experts say. Peer outreach is an essential tool in prevention.

“The international theme is ‘keep the promise,’” Yamashita said, “and it’s the promise that we will remain engaged ... that we’ll do everything we can. The promise of making sure we are good partners.”

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## HIGH STAKES ACCOMPANY GLOBAL CLIMATE CHANGE

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Nations meet in Bali, Indonesia, on how to head off global warming

By Lea Terhune  
USINFO Staff Writer

Washington -- As delegates gather for the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Bali, Indonesia, the stakes could not be higher. The Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) makes it clear that global warming is an "unequivocal" reality whose effects now are being felt around the world.

"Climate change is a serious problem, and humans are contributing to it. We are at a critical moment," Under Secretary of State Paula Dobriansky recently told the U.S. Congress. "We are committed to doing our part."

"We seek a 'Bali Road Map' that will advance negotiations" under the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), to be in place by 2009, she said. Dobriansky leads the U.S. delegation to Bali, which also includes senior climate negotiator Harlan Watson.

Greenhouse gases, especially carbon dioxide, produced by human activity are major contributors to global warming, according to the IPCC report. Reducing emissions is critical for conservation of the global environment. Irreversible effects of global warming already have been seen, but scientists say that prompt action can stop many more negative effects.

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the potential impacts of climate change, the report says. Crop production will be affected; large human migrations will occur. The developing world is most vulnerable.

"Bali is a starting point, not the conclusion," Watson said after the release of the IPCC final synopsis November 17.

The Bali conference that runs December 3-14 involves 191 countries and will consider ways to meet the looming environmental crisis.

The participants face tough questions, according to Angela Anderson, vice president for climate programs at the National Environmental Trust, a Washington-based, nonpartisan advocacy group.

"Do we continue to maintain the notion of common but differentiated responsibilities? Everyone agrees that the developing world has to make a contribution toward reducing emissions. ... The IPCC has made it pretty clear that if only developed countries reduce emissions, we can't get where we need to go" to stabilize greenhouse gases, she said.

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon observed the impact of climate change firsthand in southern Chile. (© AP Images)  
"There are tremendous needs that go beyond the standard sustainable development assistance that the U.S. and other nations provide," she said.

The "touchiest" and most critical challenge is "to set guiding principles for the mitigation goals for the next two years," Anderson said, adding that at U.N. talks in August, goals were outlined for an agreement that would put emissions reductions "within the range of 25-40 percent below today's levels."

The chief elements to negotiate in the face of the rapid global climate change detailed in the IPCC report, U.S. officials say, are mitigation, adaptation and technology development and transfer.

"[T]he issue warrants urgent action, and we need to bring forward, in a more accelerated way, the technology that will make a lasting solution possible," White House Council on Environmental Quality Chairman James Connaughton said, adding the United States wants mutually acceptable agreements with other nations to curb greenhouse gas emissions in a manner that does not hinder economic growth. The U.S. government promotes and funds a wide range of programs, domestic and international, to mitigate these worst outcomes. Cooperation with major economies of Europe and Asia to utilize existing clean and sustainable energy technologies and develop new ones is a high priority, U.S. officials say.

The Asia-Pacific Partnership on Clean Development and Climate and the Global Village Energy Partnership are two such U.S. initiatives that engage governments and the private sector in China, India, Japan, the Republic of Korea and Latin America to work toward clean development goals alongside national objectives.

“What may happen in Bali is a likely agreement on the road map for the future,” Rajendra Pachauri, IPCC chairman, told the Associated Press. He said he looks for “likely timetables and deadlines” that will extend beyond 2012. The Kyoto Protocol, which commits signatory countries to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, expires in 2012.

The urgency is underlined by recent scientific evidence not reflected in the IPCC report. Scientists say the new data are alarming.

“That’s expected,” Angela Anderson said, yet she emphasizes the positive. “Estimates of the technology, the solutions, and the mitigation scenarios that are available are within our grasp. They are affordable when you look at the global economic cost of them. It’s doable. We can mitigate the worst impacts of global warming,” she said, “if there is the worldwide political will to do so.”

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together.”

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## NEW APPROACH TO DEVELOPMENT EMBRACES INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

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Global Development Commons will democratize access to information

By Kathryn McConnell  
USINFO Staff Writer

Washington – The United States is embracing a new approach to international development that involves expanded use of information technology and more private-public partnerships.

The Global Development Commons (GDC), launched by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), will use technology to allow aid donors and recipients to communicate better and to find needed information online from such sources as libraries and databases.

It □  
changes and conferences, creating “a comprehensive network accessible to all,” according to a USAID fact sheet.

The GDC “democratizes” information and allows individuals and organizations to ask questions and look for new partners, according to the fact sheet.

The GDC is intended to be a “community of continuous and real-time exchange, collaboration, partnership and action” among public and private donors, agencies, nongovernmental organizations, governments and civil society -- “all operating as equals,” Henrietta Fore, USAID administrator and director of U.S. foreign aid, said in a November press release.

USAID recently hosted the first Global Development Commons forum to discuss ways in which technology and increased public-private partnerships can benefit development.

With USAID, other U.S. government entities to be involved in GDC include the Millennium Challenge Corporation, the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), the departments of State and Defense and Congress.

The effort initially will involve technology firms Microsoft and Cisco, food giant Kraft and financial service company Goldman Sachs.

Although USAID is launching and publicizing the GDC and will monitor its implementation, the initiative is intended as a “shared responsibility” of all who use it, the agency said.

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sustainable solutions,” Fore said at a meeting of the Voluntary Committee on Voluntary Foreign Aid in October.

More information about GDC and the full text of Fore’s prepared remarks in October are available on the USAID Web site.

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## MODERN TRANSIT SYSTEM COMES TO CAMEROON, THANKS TO U.S. COMPANY

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Bus partnership draws interest from investors, other African countries

Washington -- In Cameroon, when 28 new buses moved from Douala, the port and commercial center, to the capital city of Yaoundé in August 2006, excitement was so high that people were lining the streets and the 200-kilometer highway connecting the two cities to cheer the convoy. The comfortable modern buses brought by Transnational Automotive Group (TAUG), a Los Angeles-based company, were a harbinger of something new for Cameroonians.

At that time, the capital had lacked a functioning mass transportation system for more than 15 years, and its streets were clogged with taxis, motor bikes and other vehicles packed beyond capacity with people, goods and livestock. On intercity routes, several operators competed, but they ran old or salvaged buses and the service was poor and sometimes unsafe.

“There was a screaming need for something better, more reliable and modern,” Seid Sadat, TAUG chief financial officer, told USINFO.

In 2005, TAUG’s founders, former auto industry veterans with experience in Africa, were asked by Cameroonian government officials to consider running city bus systems in their country.

Considered on a purely commercial basis, such an offer would have been rejected. City mass transportation systems worldwide tend to be either unprofitable or subsidized. But TAUG’s corporate mission is to facilitate work force growth and commerce in the developing world. So TAUG agreed to form a joint venture with the government the same year.

Building on economic momentum brought about by official debt relief in 2006, Cameroon’s president, Paul Biya, was eager to attract more foreign investment and create some immediate improvements in the daily lives of average Cameroonians, according to TAUG executives.

A well-functioning city bus service was a high-priority project because the government expected it to bring the most tangible benefits to the population in a short time.

TAUG Chief Executive Officer Ralph Thomson says that in the early stages the venture had to deal with some challenges related to cultural differences and different views on the very nature of business.

“We went through a mutual learning curve, both with government officials and the local private sector,” he told USINFO.

But the Cameroonian leadership, including the president and the prime minister, was eager to resolve any problems, Thomson said.

As a result, the September 2006 launch of LeBus, a subsidized city bus system in Yaoundé, was “notably smooth” and enthusiastically welcomed by city residents, according to both executives. It has served as a catalyst for positive effects on the city’s modernization efforts and the life of its residents, they said.

The biggest challenge turned out to be winning the confidence of ordinary people and convincing them that the company was in Cameroon to stay, Sadat said. TAUG, which employs 700 workers, all but three of whom are Cameroonians, vowed to become one of the largest employers in the country.

TAUG has introduced high-quality customer services and social programs. For example, schoolchildren, who used to walk three kilometers or more to school on unsafe roads, ride LeBus under supervision. Journalists have been promised discounted fares. The company also has promoted women drivers.

TAUG's operations were watched closely by other African governments and local and U.S. investors, who had been somewhat skeptical about the feasibility of infrastructure investment in sub-Saharan Africa. (See related article.)

Those operations are successful by any measure, according to TAUG executives. In a year, LeBus has transported around 5 million passengers. LeCar, a wholly-owned subsidiary launched in December 2006, makes a decent profit running intercity buses between the capital and Douala.

Biya told company executives in October that he had received very favorable comments on the quality and reliability of their company's services from many sources.

TAUG also won a 2007 State Department Award for Corporate Excellence for its work in Cameroon. At the award ceremony in November, U.S. Ambassador to Cameroon Janet Garvey praised the company for employment practices and its clean, comfortable and reliable service.

The company's operations serve "as an example of how our nations can work together to forge win-win situations in Cameroon and serve as a model applicable across the African continent," she said.

But the best evidence of the company's success is invitations from the governments of 13 African countries that want TAUG to invest in their economies.

This success also opened "many doors" in Cameroon. TAUG, which already has increased its investment in Cameroon with support from a U.S. government agency, plans to expand into other sectors including oil, natural gas and renewable energy ventures, auto assembly, low-cost housing and quality hotel development.

More information about TAUG is available on the company's Web site. More information about the ACE program is available on the State Department Web site

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